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Injurious effects of Slave Labour
An Impartial Appeal to the
Reason, Justice and Patriotism
of the people of Illinois.
Philadelphia, 1824.





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THE INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF SLAVE
" LABOUR :

AN

IMPARTIAL APPEAL

TO THE

REASON, JUSTICE, AND PATRIOTISM

OF THE

PEOPLE OF ILLINOIS

ON THE

Injurious Effects of Slave Labour.

PHILADELPHIA, PRINTED :

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FOR THE

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS.

1824.

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NOTICE.

THE State of Illinois, in America, adopted a Constitution of Government which excluded Slavery from its territory. Its lands, however, being rich and abundant, have been eyed with cupidity by the Slave-holders of Virginia, the Carolinas, &c. as affording them a market for their Slaves, whom they can no longer profitably employ on their own worn-out soils. They have, therefore, been inciting the citizens of Illinois to call a Convention for the purpose of revising their Constitution; the real object of this revisal being to remove the existing interdiction of Slavery. The Convention is to assemble in the course of the present year. A large proportion of the inhabitants of this State, with their excellent governor, Mr. Cole, at their head, are strongly opposed to any such change; and they have been taking great pains to diffuse among their fellow-citizens such information as may deter them from adopting that tempting but insidious and injurious proposal. One of the pamphlets circulated on this occasion has reached this country; and as, from the beginning to the end of it, the arguments (which it will be admitted are very powerful, if not irresistible) will be found to apply with still more force to the case of our own Colonies, than to that of Illinois, it has been thought expedient to republish it. The facts and reasonings contained in it are particularly recommended to the attentive consideration of West-India Proprietors.

Q. S. 22/61

INJURIOUS EFFECTS

OF

SLAVE LABOUR,

&c. &c.

WHEN a people, educated with the principles and habits of freemen, blessed with the light of Christianity—who live under a Government of their own choice, and belong moreover to a great Commonwealth of free Republics; when such a people, desirous of altering the frame of their Constitution, make a solemn call for a convention for that purpose, there would seem to be but one conclusion to be drawn from the circumstance: some great defect has been discovered in that Constitution; some bar to the distribution of justice; some heavy incumbrance upon the operations of the Government. Such would be the conclusions of a person acquainted with the nature of our institutions, yet ignorant of the particular facts, upon being told that the people of Illinois had now to deliberate upon such a question. How great would be his surprise at learning that the main object in calling this Convention was to enable the citizens of Illinois to hold Slaves!

The grand argument for this change in the Constitution is the effect which it would have upon the value of land, and upon the general prosperity of the State, by introducing the cultivation of cotton and tobacco. It is true, that its first effect might be to raise the price of lands along our southern border. Persons anxious to take advantage of any change would purchase them on speculation. Planters from the southern side of the Ohio would probably remove with their

are all visible in the operations of the one; while in the other are as distinctly to be seen, the degradation, the apathy, the want of motive, the slothfulness and wastefulness inseparable from the character of a Slave.

These general principles, as they are founded in the nature of man and of things, are of universal application. The results, however, may be so modified by circumstances, as to appear at first sight contradictory. To take an instance in point: In the State of Illinois the price of labour is far above what may be regarded as its natural standard; for the wages of one day will support the labourer for several days. The causes of this are, the plenty and cheapness of land and provision, and the scarcity of labourers. A man readily earns enough money to purchase a small farm, and naturally prefers the condition of a farmer to that of a day labourer. From this cause it arises that more land than can be tilled by the farmer and his children is an incumbrance, or at least useless to him. The owner of large tracts may find it difficult to procure free labourers; and to him, in this state of affairs, the labour of Slaves may possibly be cheaper than that of Free Men. But the prosperity of this individual does not necessarily increase that of the State. The real value of labour is the same in this as in all other cases; and its high price, in the present instance, only enables the labourer the sooner to commence proprietor, and enjoy the whole profit of his industry himself; thus distributing, as it were, into a thousand channels, that wealth which, in the case of the large Slave-holder, goes to swell a single stream. In the early stage of a settlement, the employment of Slaves enables rich individuals to bring an excess of agricultural products into the market for exportation, and thus create enormous fortunes. This, however, is not always a real indication of prosperity: it is often but drawing for present use upon the future resources of the country; and if the introduction of Slaves be a virtual exclusion of Free Labourers, as it has universally been found to be, it is the infliction of an incurable wound upon the future growth of the nation.

One of the most remarkable experiments that has yet been made upon the value of Free and Slave labour, was tried by

the Hon. Joshua Steele, of Barbadoes. He was owner of an estate of nearly three hundred Slaves, and tried with great success the plan of paying them for task-work. Being put (without a premium) to work in the common manner, eighteen of the same Negroes did not do as much in a given time as six had performed a few days before with a small reward. His experiments ended in his giving regular wages, which the industry he had excited among his whole gang enabled him to pay. An alteration was made in the mode of governing the Slaves: the whips were taken from the overseers, all arbitrary punishments were abolished, and all offences were tried, and sentence passed, by a Negro Court. His people became contented; and in little better than four years the annual net clearance of his estate was more than tripled. Who does not perceive that he had virtually changed his Slaves into Free Men, by awakening in them the love of gain, the feelings of emulation, and the sense of self-dependence?

It is calculated by Mr. Coulomb, a French engineer, who served for many years in the West Indies, that field Slaves do only between a third and a half of the work dispatched by reluctant French soldiers, and probably not more than a third of what those very Slaves would do if urged by their own interest.

"I have watched," remarks a traveller in the Brazils, "two parties labouring in the same field—one of Free persons, the other of Slaves—which occasionally, though very seldom, occurs. The former are singing, joking, and laughing, and are always actively turning hand and foot; whilst the latter are silent; and if they are viewed from a little distance, their motions are scarcely to be perceived."

The Petersburg Virginia Auxiliary Colonization Society, in a late Report to the Parent Institution, makes the following statement:—"A farmer cultivates a farm of 10,000 acres with 300 Slaves. Of these at least 150 may be deducted as supernumeraries, and fifty more as old and infirm, children and sick, domestics, and such as are required to administer to the daily wants of their fellows. But deduct only fifty in all, and it is evident that they, as well as their masters and overseers, must be supported by the labour of the residue.

Owing to this wretched system, connected with the bad cultivation, the indolent and destructive habits generated by slavery, the master amasses nothing, but barely supports his family, while his property is daily depreciating. It may be assumed, that the labour of forty Free Men, judiciously bestowed on these 10,000 acres, would be as productive as that of 300 Slaves. But the labour of 300 Slaves may, under our assumption, be considered about equal to their support; and, at 100 dollars each, will amount to 30,000 dollars, which sum will be necessary for the preservation of the estate or principal. The support of forty free labourers, at 150 dollars each, will be 6000 dollars; consequently, the gross produce of the labour of Slaves and freemen being the same, while the profits of the former are entirely absorbed for the support of the farm, there will be an actual clear profit in favour of the latter, of 24,000 dollars over and above their support."

This statement is confirmed, in the fullest manner, by the unimpeachable testimony of the Hon. Bushrod Washington. This gentleman made a sale of a number of his Negroes in the year 1821, which excited some public animadversion. He thought proper to publish a vindication of the transaction; in which he assigns as his chief reason for parting with them, that they were a constant burthen upon his estate. "I had struggled for about twenty years," says he, "to pay for the expenses of my farm, and to afford a comfortable support to those who cultivate it from the produce of their labour. In this way to have balanced that account would have satisfied me. But I always had to draw upon my other resources for those objects; and I would state, upon the best of my judgment, that the produce of the farm had in general fallen short of its support, from 500 to 1000 dollars annually. To the best of my recollection, I have, during the above period, two years excepted, had to buy corn for the Negroes, for which I have sometimes paid five, six, and seven dollars the barrel. Last year I commenced the purchase of this article for ninety Negroes, in the month of May, and so continued to the end of it."

"A comparison of Pennsylvania with Virginia," says a candid observer, "certainly shews us that it is the labour of Free Men which enriches a country. A farmer in the former,

with three or four hands, lives better and more comfortable, and saves more money, than another in the latter with four times as many Slaves. For the work done in the common business of agriculture, the labour of Free persons is by far cheaper than that of Slaves. There is an intelligence in its details, which the Slave is not intrusted with; or, if known to him, that he has no motive to exert."

"A few Polish nobles," says Coxe, in his Travels in Poland, "have ventured upon the expedient of giving liberty to their vassals. It appears that in the district in which this new arrangement has been introduced, the population of their villages has been considerably increased, and the revenues of the estates augmented in a triple proportion."

It is not merely a few scattered examples, however, that prove the superior cheapness of free labour. The people of China, Hindostan, and the Indian Islands, are an enterprising and industrious race—personally, though not politically, free. Notwithstanding the arbitrary character of their Governments, and the system of monopoly so injurious to industry and enterprise which prevails in the European commerce with those countries, so admirably are their climates adapted to the growth of cotton, sugar, indigo, and coffee, and so vast is the extent of land fit for the cultivation of these staple articles, that the whole world may be supplied with them from these sources alone. In the article of indigo, of which the single State of South Carolina at one time exported more than a million of pounds annually, the East Indians have, by the superior cheapness and quality of their manufacture, almost wholly forced the Slave Labourer out of the market. Without a change of policy in America and the West Indies, the same results may take place with cotton, sugar, and coffee. These can be raised in India by Free Labourers at nearly one half the cost of their production by Slaves; and the inevitable consequences will be, that the Negroes of America must be raised to the condition of Free Labourers, or they must eventually abandon the cultivation of these articles.

The free Republics of South America, acting on the soundest maxims of justice and policy, have proclaimed freedom to their Slaves. No quarter of the globe is better fitted for the cultivation of all the staple commodities of our

Southern States. It is therefore destined, at no very distant period, not merely to compete with us in foreign markets, but finally, perhaps, even to supplant us. For it will not be hazard-ing much, to say, that if *we* persist in tilling and planting by Slaves, and *they* pursue the more rational and economical plan of cultivating their lands by Free Men, they will, by selling cheaper, compel us to abandon the unequal strife.

With these facts and prospects before them, what inducement have the people of Illinois to try this fatal experiment? It is not for a moment supposed by any one, that Slaves would be worth purchasing for the cultivation of wheat and maize. It is well understood, that the object of the alteration is to enable the owner of rich lands along the Ohio and Mississippi to bring them into cultivation for cotton and tobacco*. It has been proved, that Slave labour is always dearer than the labour of Free Men; that even where it enables the Slave-holder to effect a premature cultivation of the soil, it ultimately stints the prosperity of the State; and that, consequently, in all cases where it is profitable, it would be still more so to the nation at large and the individual cultivator, that he were a free man.

It has ever been a plea for Slavery, that Negroes are alone capable of effectually supporting the fatigue and exposure of labour under a vertical sun; but if the argument were even applicable to our clime, we have the testimony of the celebrated Humboldt to prove its fallacy. "There are," says that accurate observer, "in the hot plains of America, near the Equator, men of the genuine European race, who are as athletic as the peasantry of Spain, and perform all sorts of field labour without inconvenience." There is also a notion prevalent, that Slaves only are fit for the cultivation of cotton and tobacco; than which nothing can be more erroneous. Not to speak of the more simple and frugal Asiatic, there is

* The plea which is so much urged by the advocates of Slavery, that, if it be not introduced, or, at least, that if the permission granted in the Constitution for the employment of Slaves in the great Saline, till the year 1824, be not renewed, the salt works will be no longer valuable, and the revenue derived from them to the State will cease, is not worth refuting. There is no part of the labour of making salt which is not performed by the free White citizens of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York; and the latter State derives a large revenue from her salt springs thus worked; larger, without doubt, than if Slaves were employed in the manufacture.

nothing in any part of the world to sanction such an opinion. Tobacco is raised in large quantities for home consumption throughout Europe. Cotton is esteemed the most profitable crop in the south of Italy, where it is very generally cultivated by the peasantry and small farmers. It forms a principal export from Greece and the Levant ; and it has been asserted, that the valley of Ceres, in Macedonia, produces 20,000,000 pounds annually. In all these cases the cultivators are free-men. Its cultivation is, in fact, admirably suited to small farms. It requires but little severe labour ; and there is, perhaps, no kind of agricultural pursuit of which women and children can take so large and useful a share. Let the experiment be fairly tried in Illinois, and the issue cannot long be doubtful. A new staple of commerce will be introduced ; the superior profits of its cultivation must attract the attention of farmers from the East ; and it will probably be found, that an emigration of Freemen equal in number and superior in all respects in value to that which would have taken place of Slaves, will speedily occur. The price of lands and the general trade of the State will be more increased by such an emigration than by hordes of Slaves.

If Slave labour be less profitable to the landholder than the labour of Free Men, its effects must be seen in the state of agriculture, and the general appearance of the country. Upon this head, also, of the argument, there is ample testimony.

The first authority which I shall produce is that of Col. John Taylor, now a Senator of the United States from Virginia, who wrote a series of Essays, a few years since, on the Agriculture of that State, and who is a most competent witness. In proving that "the fertility of Virginia has long been declining," he observes,— "The decay in the culture of tobacco is testimony to this unwelcome fact. It is deserted because the lands are exhausted. To conceal from ourselves a disagreeable truth, we resort to the delusion that tobacco requires new or fresh land. Whole counties, comprising large districts of country which once grew tobacco in great quantities, are now too sterile to grow any of moment ; and the wheat crops substituted for tobacco, have already sunk to an average below profit.

"I have known many farms for above forty years ; and,

though I think that all of them have been greatly impoverished, yet I rely more upon the general fact which I have stated, for agreeing with Strickland in opinion, ‘ that Virginia is in a rapid decline.’

“ Negro Slavery is a misfortune to agriculture incapable of removal, and only within the reach of palliation.

“ The fact is, that Negro Slavery is an evil which the United States must look in the face. To whine over it is cowardly; to aggravate it, criminal; and to forbear to alleviate it because it cannot be wholly cured, foolish.”

The testimony of Col. Taylor is of great authority. He gives full evidence of the wretched condition of the agriculture of Virginia, which is plainly caused by Slavery, and can only be meliorated by raising the Slave to the rank of a Free Labourer.

“ The State of Maryland,” says an intelligent observer, “ although a Slave State, has comparatively but few Slaves in the upper or western part of it: the land in the upper district is generally more broken by hills and stones, and is not so fertile as that in the eastern and southern parts. The latter has also the advantage of being situated upon the navigable rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay, and its produce can be conveyed to market at one-third of the average expense of that from the upper part of the State; yet, with all these advantages of soil, situation, and climate, the land within the Slave district will not, upon a general average, sell for half as much per acre as in the upper district, which is cultivated principally by Freemen. In Virginia also, land of the same natural soil and local advantages, will not sell for one-third as high a price as the same description of land will command in Pennsylvania.

“ It is believed that no country can furnish more full and clear opportunity than the United States of America do at this time, of testing the effect of domestic Slavery upon the industry and prosperity of a nation, and the relative value and profit of Free and Slave labour. The middle and eastern States are now cultivated almost entirely by Freemen. These States lie under a more rigorous climate, and possess a less fertile soil than the southern States; yet the prosperous situation of the country, the general comfort of the inhabitants,

and the improved condition of agriculture in them, compared with the Slave States, are so obvious, as to strike the traveller immediately as he passes from one district to the other. In the one we find the whole country divided into small farms of from 100 to 150 acres of land; on each of these tracts is generally erected a comfortable dwelling-house, with the necessary out-buildings, which are surrounded by well cultivated fields in good order. In this district the farmers, with but few exceptions, annually realize a small profit, by which they are enabled, as their children attain to manhood, to make respectable provision for their establishment in business. In the other we meet here and there, thinly scattered over a wretchedly cultivated district of country, a mansion-house, commonly in bad repair, surrounded by a number of dirty beggarly huts, crowded with ragged Negroes and Mulattoes, and the whole bearing the strongest marks of oppression and suffering, in which the half-starved neglected cattle, and other domestic animals, evidently participate."

How exactly would the following description apply to the present condition of this country! How uniformly hideous in every age have been the features of Slavery! "While the ancient Romans," says a late writer, "cultivated their fields themselves, Italy was renowned for its abundance and fertility; but agriculture declined when it was abandoned to Slaves. The small proprietors and farmers disappeared; and the same country which had formerly presented the smiling aspect of a crowd of villages, with their contented and Free inhabitants, became a vast solitude, with here and there a magnificent palace, rising amidst the miserable huts and caverns inhabited by the Slaves."

"The introduction of Slavery into this country," says Judge Tucker, of Virginia, "is at this day considered among its greatest misfortunes."

Such are the opinions and warning accents of our southern brethren! They feel this mighty evil as a cancer at their vitals; they apologise to themselves and to the world for its continuance, that they found it diffused through and poisoning every ramification of their system; that they received it from their ancestors—an inheritance of incurable disease, con-

suming their strength, darkening their present enjoyments, and blighting their hopes of the future.

"No persons," says Gen. Robert G. Harper, of Maryland; "who have seen the Slave-holding States and those where Slavery does not exist, and has compared ever so slightly their condition and situation, can have failed to be struck with the vast difference in favour of the latter. This difference extends to every thing, except only the character and manners of the most opulent and best educated people. These are very much the same every where. But in population, in the general diffusion of wealth and comfort, in public and private improvements, in the education, manners, and mode of life of the middle and labouring classes, in the face of the country, in roads, bridges, and inns, in schools and churches, in the general advancement of improvement and prosperity, there is no comparison. The change is seen the instant you cross the line which separates the country where there are Slaves from that where there are none. Even in the same State, the part where Slaves mostly abound, are uniformly the worst cultivated, the poorest, and the least populous; while wealth and improvement uniformly increase as the number of Slaves diminishes. I might prove and illustrate this position by many examples drawn from a comparison of different States, as Maryland and Pennsylvania, and between different counties in the same State, as Charles County, and Frederick County, in Maryland; but it is unnecessary, because every body who has seen the different parts of the country, has been struck by the difference.

"Whence does it arise? I answer, From this—that in one division of the country, the land is cultivated by Free Men for their own benefit, and in the other almost entirely by Slaves for the benefit of their masters. It is the obvious interest of the first class of labourers to produce as much and consume as little as possible; and, of the second class, to consume as much and produce as little as possible. What the Slave consumes is for himself; what he produces is for his master. All the time he can withdraw from labour is for himself; all that he spends in labour is devoted to his master. All that the Free Labourer, on the contrary, can produce, is for himself;

all that he can save is so much added to his own stock. All the time that he loses from labour is his own loss.

" This, if it were all, would probably be quite sufficient to account for the whole difference in question; but, unfortunately, it is far from being all. Another and still more injurious effect of Slavery remains to be considered.

" Where the labouring class is composed wholly or in a very considerable degree, of Slaves, and of Slaves distinguished from the Free class, by colour, feature, and origin, the idea of labour and Slavery become connected in the minds of the Free class. This arises from that association of ideas which forms one of the characteristic features of the human mind, and with which every reflecting person is well acquainted. They who from their infancy continually see Black Slaves employed in labour, and forming by much the most numerous class of labourers, insensibly associate the idea of labour and Slavery, and are almost irresistibly led to consider labour as a badge of Slavery, and consequently as a degradation. To be idle, on the contrary, is, in their view, the mark and the privilege of Free Men. The effect of this habitual feeling upon that class of free Whites who ought to labour, and consequently upon their condition and that of society, will be readily perceived by those who reflect upon such subjects. It is seen in the vast difference between the labouring classes of Whites in the southern and middle and those of the northern and eastern States. Why are the latter incomparably more industrious, more thriving, more orderly, more comfortably situated than the former? The effect is obvious to all those who have travelled through the different parts of our country. What is the cause? It is found in the association between the idea of Slavery and the idea of labour; and the feeling produced by this association, that labour, the proper occupation of Negro Slaves, is degrading to a Free Man.

" It is therefore obvious, that a vast benefit would be conferred on the country, and especially on the Slave-holding districts, if all the Slave labourers could be gradually and imperceptibly withdrawn from cultivation, and their place supplied with Free labourers.

In conclusion, we would apply to the citizens of Illinois the language used by the Colonial Assembly of Virginia, in a petition to the British Throne in the year 1772, against the further importation of Slaves :—

“ We are sensible that some of your Majesty’s subjects of Great Britain may reap emoluments from this traffic ; and when we consider that it greatly retards the settlement of the colonies with *more useful inhabitants*, and may in time have the most destructive influence, we presume to hope that the *interests of a few* will be disregarded, when placed in competition with the security and happiness of such numbers of your Majesty’s dutiful and loyal subjects.”

Such, then, is the result of an impartial examination of this momentous question. We will not remark upon the moral evil of Slavery. No honest man will contend for its rectitude. Where, then, are its expediency and policy ? They are to be found alone in the cupidity of interested speculators. These, indeed, may gain some thousands by a temporary increase of the price of lands in a few sections of the State. And is it for this—to enrich a handful of land-jobbers—that the fair territory of Illinois is to be cursed with barrenness, and blackened with a servile population, which may in time demand all the energies of the free to retain in bondage ? Citizens of Illinois, be warned ! Let your decision of this question evince that you respect the peace and prosperity of your descendants, and that you regard Slavery, as it truly is, altogether and essentially an evil of incalculable magnitude, possessing not one redeeming quality to render it acceptable in your eyes. Impressed as you must be, with the solemn responsibilities of your station as men, and as freemen, acting in the sight of Heaven and of earth, you will not suffer so foul an act to disgrace the records of your State, nor wilfully incur the reproaches of all future ages, by voluntarily clasping an evil which must eventually bring upon yourselves, upon your children, and upon your children’s children, the awful retribution of an avenging and just God.

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